

## TEAM RECON:

# A New Approach To Armored TF Reconnaissance

*One Unit Hardens the HMMWV Scout Platoon to Increase Its Survivability*

by Lieutenant Colonel Henry M. St-Pierre and First Lieutenant Jamie E. Warder

### Overview

HMMWVs have given the scout excellent mobility, a decreased signature, and maximum flexibility in task organization. In both training and war, HMMWVs have proven to be an effective platform for reconnaissance at the armored task force level. This is not to say, however, that the HMMWV is a perfect match for mounted scouts. The 1995 Rand Study on Reconnaissance concluded that the issues of HMMWV mounted scout capability and survivability remain unsolved. That is, the same aspects that make the light scouts stealthy also make them very vulnerable. The HMMWV organization means today's scout platoon goes into combat essentially unarmored and too lightly armed against even the most rudimentary of heavy weapons a Third World nation can bring to bear. This organization presents two challenges to the task force commander. The first is that when the platoon, whether in its entirety or in part, is unfortunate enough to become decisively engaged, scout elements in contact do not have the organic assets to effectively break contact and "retain the freedom to maneuver." Second, the scout platoon's lack of survivability often presents the task force commander with a dilemma — "send maximum reconnaissance forward" and risk losing it early, or husband his forces and miss some important piece of information because not all "eyes" were forward where they belong.

To help resolve this problem, 1st Battalion, 33rd Armor, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, at Fort Lewis, Washington, has developed a unique solution, Team Recon. We task organize the scouts with heavy assets such as tanks or Bradleys, along with mortars, and if the situation warrants, engineers, and put them under centralized command and control to accomplish a myriad of security and reconnaissance tasks. This non-doctrinal task organiza-

tion not only increases Team Recon's long-term use as a reconnaissance asset over an extended amount of time, but also increases its ability to provide fires on an enemy force and help extricate the scout platoon should it get into trouble. This hybrid organization takes advantage of the scout platoon's stealth while at the same time increases its lethality and survivability by adding armor and indirect fires as combat multipliers. Using this concept, TF 1-33 has enjoyed success during brigade level exercises in the desert of Yakima Training Center and in the heavily wooded defiles of Fort Lewis, Washington.

Team Recon normally consists of the scout platoon, a tank platoon, a mortar section, an engineer section, two infantry dismounted squads, medical and maintenance assets, and a command and control slice controlled by the HHC commander who, again, non-doctrinally, becomes Chief of Recon. Team Recon's basic concept was borrowed from the armored cavalry troop. The force was tailored by TF 1-33 based on the observations gained by units undergoing training at NTC, JRTC, and the CMTC.

Team Recon addresses and, in part, rectifies two problems inherent to the HMMWV-pure scout platoon — survivability and lethal capability. Having "killers" forward to interdict quickly if the scouts are decisively engaged makes it easier for scouts to break direct fire contact, maneuver, and regain visual contact. The result is that the scouts stay alive, retain maneuverability, and continue to report accurate information. Team Recon also makes it easier for the task force commander to put maximum reconnaissance forward. With tanks to protect forward assets, infantry, mortars, and engineers can become major force multipliers in the reconnaissance fight. Team Recon affords the commander the ability to overwatch Named Areas of Interest

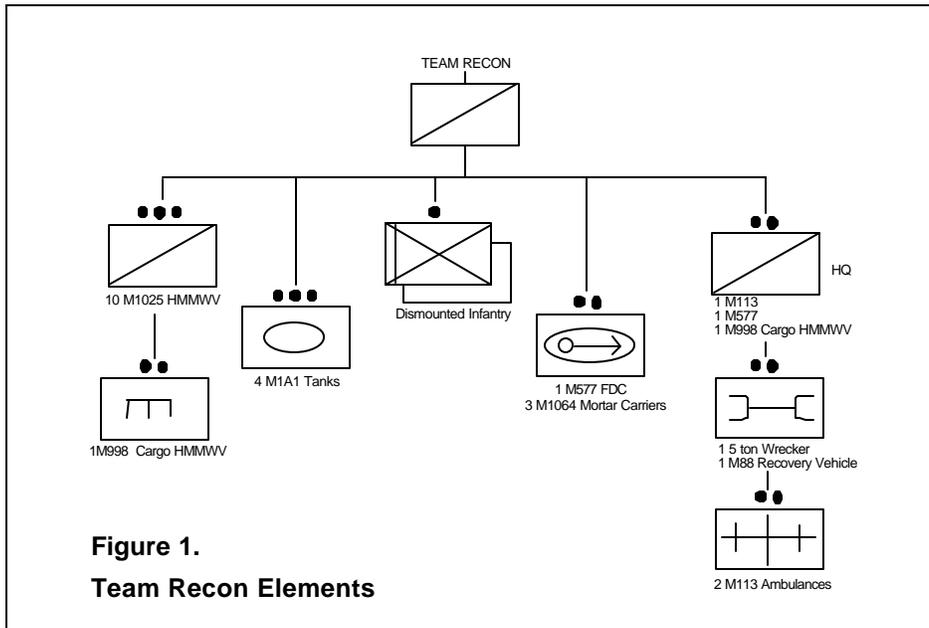
(NAIs) assigned to him by higher headquarters, conduct dismounted ambushes, and perform covert breaches before the attack.

### Task and Purpose of Each Element for Reconnaissance Operations (Task Force Offense)

The role of the scouts in Team Recon is very similar to their role when conducting operations without the benefit of added firepower/protection. Scouts are the forward element in Team Recon and the platoon conducts zone, route, or area reconnaissance to provide critical battlefield information to the task force commander. Good communication between the scouts, the tanks, and the Team Recon commander is critical to ensure that the tanks operate far enough back to preserve the scouts' stealth, but close enough to allow them to bound forward and provide direct fire support if necessary. The increased forward security from tanks allows scouts to leave fewer personnel with the vehicles and put more dismounts on the ground. Additionally, with the Team Recon NCOIC controlling vehicle and casualty evacuation, the scout platoon sergeant is able to concentrate more on fighting a reconnaissance fight and less on the logistical fight.

The tank platoon can remain as a platoon, with the four tanks working together, or fight as two sections. Their mission is to provide firepower to support the extraction of reconnaissance elements if they become decisively engaged. The armor platoon does not operate as part of a hunter/killer concept. Rather, the tanks become killers only if the scouts become embroiled in a firefight from which they cannot safely withdraw.

The tanks do, however, play an active role in the reconnaissance fight. They can use thermal capabilities to assist in long-



**Figure 1.**  
**Team Recon Elements**

range reconnaissance. They have the responsibility to locate enemy that has infiltrated behind or to the flanks of the scouts. Additionally, they provide local security for mortars and the Team Recon CSS assets.

The mortars provide indirect fires for targets of opportunity under the control of Chief of Recon or the scout platoon leader. The protection provided by the tanks allows the mortars to bound much closer to the scouts. This gives scouts greater range in engaging targets with mortar fires. The mortars also continuously update final protective fires, based on the scouts' front line trace, and are prepared to provide immediate HE and smoke to facilitate the safe extraction of forward reconnaissance elements. The mortars operate on the Team Recon radio net and clear all fires through the Chief of Recon.

For reconnaissance operations, Team Recon may utilize a squad or section of combat engineers to provide forward mobility and countermobility expertise. The engineers often are attached directly to the scout platoon. They are task organized according to the mission and are transported either in the scout HMMWV or in their own cargo HMMWV. The engineers are responsible for conducting detailed obstacle intelligence, bypass/breach marking, and bridge classifications. The sappers also have the ability to conduct covert breaches or prepare command-detonated demolition for a breach effort at a later time (i.e. task force LD).

When the Task Force is in the offense, dismounted infantry give the task force commander the option to destroy or fix opportunity targets with direct fire, either during the reconnaissance fight or after

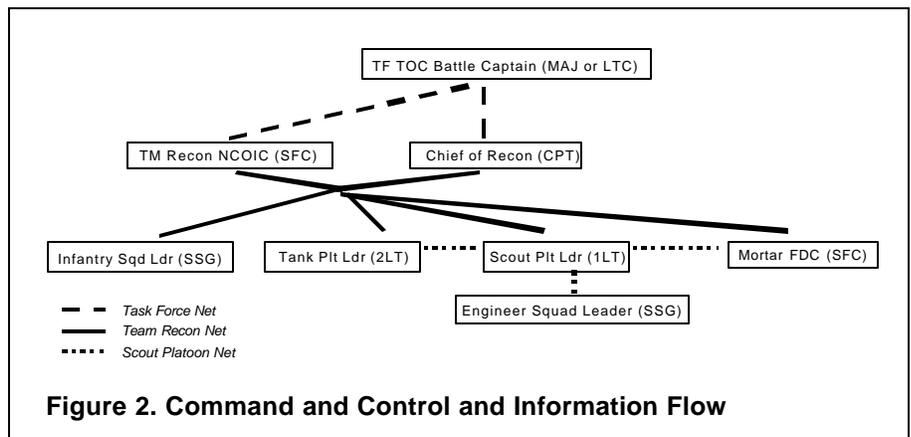
task force LD (without compromising scout assets). The dismount squads or sections also provide additional personnel to watch NAIs and set direct fire ambushes. Rather than attrit the reconnaissance effort by leaving scouts in contact with all enemies they encounter; the scouts can pass visual contact off to the infantry early and then continue to conduct forward reconnaissance. The infantry allows Team Recon to put maximum reconnaissance forward. The dismounts are inserted using IFVs, trucks, or even tanks.

The headquarters element of Team Recon consists of a Chief of Recon, a Recon NCOIC, a jump aid station, and a maintenance/recovery slice. The Chief of Recon is the HHC commander. As the most senior and experienced company grade officer in the task force, he can provide the leadership necessary to command and control the many elements of Team Recon. The Chief of Recon uses a Headquarters' tank or an APC platform and usually operates with the tanks one to two

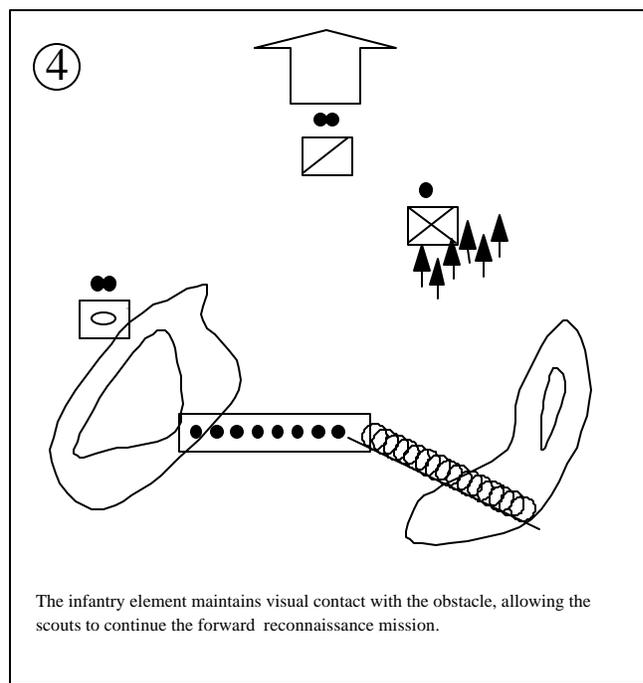
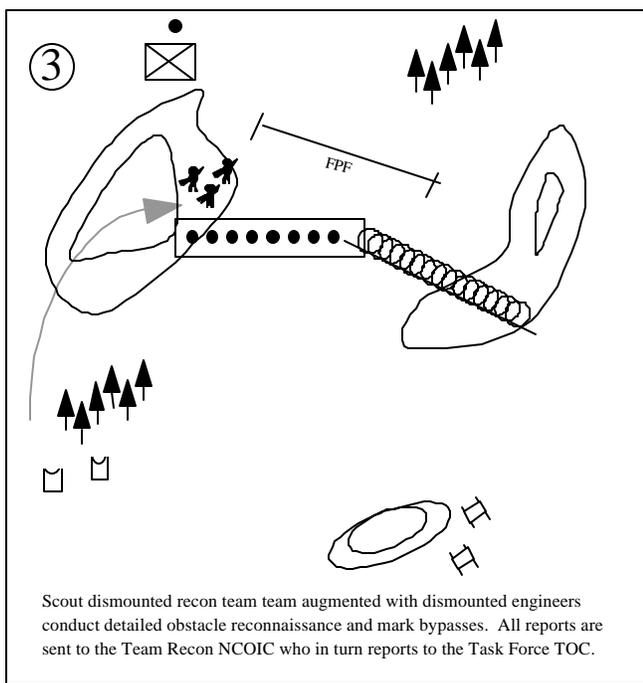
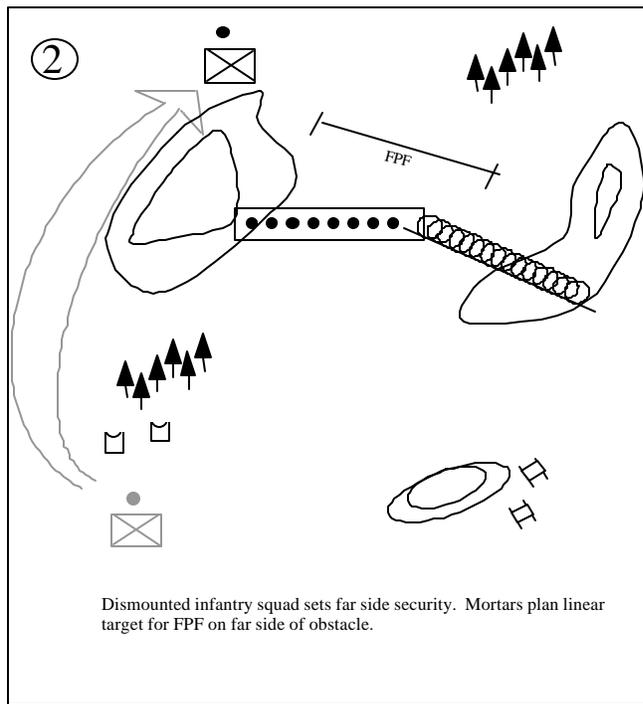
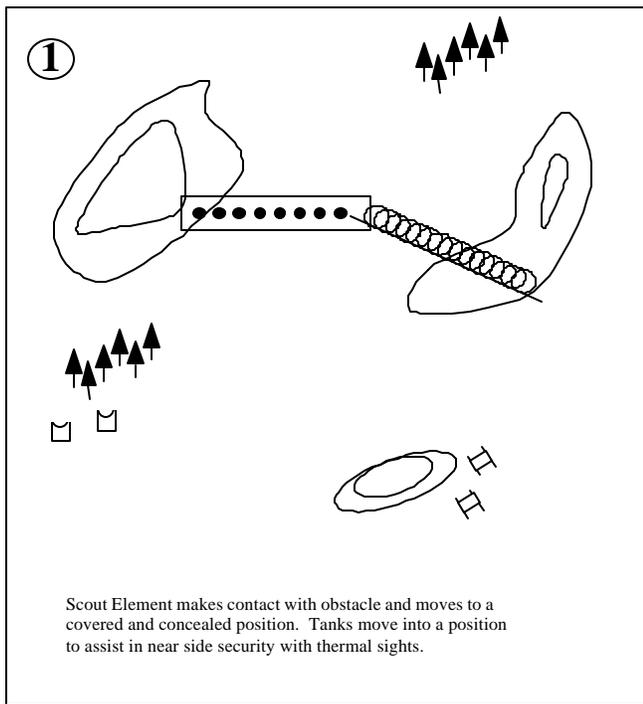
kilometers behind the FLOT. The Recon NCOIC acts as a first sergeant for Team Recon. He is responsible for logistical execution, battle tracking, and employment of the medics and maintenance. The Team Recon NCOIC for TF 1-33 comes from the S-3 shop and uses an M577 from the battalion communications section to track the battle. All tactical and logistical reports are sent to the NCOIC and he is responsible for relaying the reports to the battalion TOC.

**Team Recon and Counter-Recon (Task Force Defense)**

Although Team Recon was originally conceived for reconnaissance operations, the embedded command and control aspect of its organization makes it very compatible to counter-reconnaissance operations as well. In traditional counter-reconnaissance operations, the scout platoon usually establishes a screen line in front of a company team designated as a "counter-reconnaissance" team. There are some common problems when this type of counter-reconnaissance organization is used. First, there is often a muddled command and control relationship between the task force, the counter-reconnaissance company team, and the scout platoon. This is a result of a task organization which is usually thrown together quickly and with limited command and control planning. Second, during continuous operations, the reconnaissance and security planning phase usually takes place while the company teams are conducting operations. This makes it extremely difficult for the leadership of the counter-reconnaissance units to participate in the R&S planning process or conduct any meaningful troop leading procedures together. Finally, when a



**Figure 2. Command and Control and Information Flow**



**Figure 3. Team Recon Obstacle Drill — Showing the Elements of Team Recon Working Together**

company team fights in the counter-reconnaissance fight, they are usually severely handicapped for the ensuing defensive operation. Usually, the company team leadership is not part of the battalion orders process and dissemination of orders at the company level is very difficult while in the screen line. The result is a company team that is not well prepared for follow-on operations and usually has little or no effect on the defensive battle that occurs once the screen ends.

Team Recon alleviates many of the difficulties associated with a traditional counter-reconnaissance organization. Team Recon organically contains all of the elements necessary to create a formidable screen line, scouts, armor, indirect, and a well established command and control cell. As the commander dedicated solely to the reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance fight, the Chief of Recon can take an active role in the planning process at the task force level. He also can conduct much more detailed troop

leading procedures with his team prior to the mission. The result is a counter-reconnaissance effort that is much better informed and fights more like a cohesive team. Additionally, with Team Recon handling the counter-reconnaissance fight, the task force commander is no longer a full company team short during preparation, planning, and fighting of the defense. Once the screen is complete,

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Team Recon is a perfect force to provide rear security for the task force in the defense.

### Issues and Working Solutions

Whereas Team Recon has proven to be an excellent asset to Task Force 1-33, it has also been a challenging endeavor that presents many difficult issues. The Chief of Recon is a very time consuming, and possibly, a full-time job. Understanding the doctrinal responsibilities of the HHC Commander, we made the decision to remove him from the field trains and make him a forward combat commander. His role in the field trains is taken over by the HHC 1SG, XO, and CSM. The S-3 Air is also a good candidate to be Chief of Team Recon, depending on his experience. The non-standard task organization makes training and fighting as a team

very difficult. Team Recon often contains elements that have not trained extensively together. Habitual relationships, a good SOP with easily rehearsed extraction drills, and good command and control mitigate this problem but do not solve it.

### Conclusion

Preservation of the scouts is critical to winning the reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance battle and essential to the commander's IPB and decision-making process. Team Recon may not be the best answer nor is it the only answer, however it has provided 1-33 AR a mix of stealth and lethality that, in past tactical training, helped set the conditions necessary for us to win several of our reconnaissance battles. The success in these fights later proved critical to winning the overall fight.

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